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PROFESSIONAL COMPLIMENTARY
PICTURES ON TUESDAY AND FRIDAY

SUNDAY:

MARRYBELL MADURO
SINGER
6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.

MONDAY:

ANDERSON BAHAMON
SINGER
6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.

TUESDAY:

JEAN PAUL
SAXOPHONIST
6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.

WEDNESDAY:

MAILLEYN ALVARADO
VIOLINIST
6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.

THURSDAY:

MARRYBELL MADURO
SINGER
6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.

FRIDAY:

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New York subway ends its MetroCard era and switches fully to tap-and-go fares



A subway rider swipes his MetroCard in a turnstile as he enters the 34th St. subway station, July 23, 2007, in New York.

(AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File)

By **PHILIP MARCELO**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When the MetroCard replaced the New York City subway token in 1994, the swipecable

plastic card infused much-needed modernity into one of the world's oldest and largest transit systems. Now, more than three decades later, the gold-hued

fare card and its notoriously finicky magnetic strip are following the token into retirement.

The last day to buy or refill a MetroCard is Dec. 31, 2025, as the transit system fully transitions to OMNY, a contactless payment system that allows riders to tap their credit card, phone or other smart device to pay fares, much like they do for other everyday purchases.

Transit officials say more than 90% of subway and bus trips are now paid using the tap-and-go system, introduced in 2019.

Major cities around the world, including London and Singapore, have long used similar contactless systems. In the U.S., San Francisco

launched a pay-go system earlier this year, joining Chicago and others.

MetroCards upended how New Yorkers commute. The humble MetroCard may have outlasted its useful life, but in its day it was revolutionary, says Jodi Shapiro, curator at the New York Transit Museum in Brooklyn, which opened an exhibit earlier this month reflecting on the MetroCard's legacy. Before MetroCards, bus and subway riders relied on tokens, the brass-colored coins introduced in 1953 that were purchased from station booths. When the subway opened in 1904, paper tickets cost just a nickel, or about \$1.82 in today's dollars.

"There was a resistance to change from tokens to something else because tokens work," Shapiro said on a recent visit to the museum, housed underground in a decommissioned subway station. "MetroCards introduced a whole other level of thinking for New Yorkers." The Metropolitan Transportation Authority launched public campaigns to teach commuters how to swipe the originally blue-colored cards correctly, hoping to avoid the dreaded error message or lost fares. Officials even briefly toyed with the idea of a quirky mascot, the Cardvaark, before coming to their senses.

The cards quickly became collectors items as the transit system rolled out special commemorative editions marking major events, such as the "Subway Series" between baseball's New York Mets and the New York Yankees in the 2000 World Series. At the time, a fare cost \$1.50. Artists from David Bowie and Olivia Rodrigo to seminal New York hip hop acts, such as the Wu-Tang Clan, the Notorious B.I.G. and LL Cool J, have also graced the plastic card over the years, as have iconic New York shows like Seinfeld and Law & Order.

"For me, the most special cards are cards which present New York City to the world," said Lev Radin, a

collector in the Bronx. "Not only photos of landmarks, skylines, but also about people who live and make New York special."

Perfecting the correct angle and velocity of the MetroCard swipe also became something of a point of pride separating real New Yorkers from those just visiting.

During her failed 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton, a former U.S. Senator from New York, took an excruciating five swipes at a Bronx turnstile.

In fairness, her chief Democratic opponent at the time, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, a native Brooklynite, didn't even appear to realize tokens had been discontinued.

Cost savings and lingering concerns

Unlike the MetroCard rollout, OMNY has required little adjustment.

Riders reluctant to use a credit card or smart device can purchase an OMNY card they can reload, similar to a MetroCard. Existing MetroCards will also continue to work into 2026, allowing riders to use remaining balances. MTA spokespersons declined to comment, pointing instead to their many public statements as the deadline approaches. The agency has said the changeover saves at least \$20 million annually in MetroCard-related costs.

The new system also allows unlimited free rides within a seven-day period because the fare is capped after 12 rides. It'll max out at \$35 a week once the fare rises to \$3 in January.

Still, new changes come with tradeoffs, with some critics raising concerns about data collection and surveillance.

Near Times Square on a recent morning, Ronald Minor was among the dwindling group of "straphangers" still swiping MetroCards.

The 70-year-old Manhattan resident said he's sad to see them go. He has an OMNY card but found the vending machines to reload it more cumbersome. □

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Anonymous money fuels \$5 million in attacks on Georgia's Lt. Gov. Burt Jones

By JEFF AMY

Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — It's the biggest mystery in Georgia politics right now: Who's paying for the attacks on Republican Lt. Gov. Burt Jones? Someone operating under the name "Georgians for Integrity" has dumped around \$5 million into television ads, mailers and texts. The attacks claim Jones, who already has President Donald Trump's endorsement in his run for governor next year, has been using his office to enrich himself.

For any Georgian settling down to watch a football game, the ads have been nearly inescapable since Thanksgiving. They're the opening shot in the public battle for the Republican nomination that will be settled in May's primary election. But the ads also show how dark money is influencing politics not only at the national level but in the states, with secretive interests dropping big sums seeking to shift public opinion.

The Jones campaign is hopping mad, threatening legal action against television stations if they don't stop airing ads that a lawyer calls "demonstrably false" and slanderous.

So far, the ads remain on air.

"They want to be anonymous, spend a lot of money, and create a lot of lies about myself and my family," Jones told WSB-AM in an interview



Georgia Lt. Gov. Burt Jones speaks at a campaign event at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre on Oct. 15, 2024, in Atlanta.

Dec. 16, calling the ads "fabricated trash."

Attorney General Chris Carr and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, Jones' top rivals for the Republican nomination, say they are not involved in the attacks. All three want to succeed Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, who can't run again because of term limits. There are also multiple Democrats vying for the state's top office.

Dark money marches on

The Georgia Republican Party has filed a complaint with the State Ethics Commission. The GOP claims the ads violate Georgia's campaign

finance law against spending on an election without registering and disclosing donors. "I think there are far-reaching consequences to allowing this activity to go forward unchecked," state Republican Party Chairman Josh McKoon told The Associated Press. "And the consequences are much broader than the outcome of the May primary."

It's a further filtering down of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision, which led to dramatic increases in independent spending in U.S. elections, said Shanna Ports, senior legal counsel for the Washing-

ton, D.C.-based Campaign Legal Center, which seeks to reduce the influence of money in politics.

"Dark money is becoming more and more the norm in races, up and down the ballot, and at early times," Ports said.

Claims that Jones has been engaged in self-dealing are nothing new — Carr has been making similar attacks for months. But things escalated after Georgians for Integrity was incorporated in Delaware on Nov. 24, according to that state's corporation records. The entity identifies itself as a nonprofit social welfare organization

under the federal tax code, a popular way to organize campaign spending that lets a group hide its donors.

The Jones campaign says the ad falsely leads viewers to believe that Jones enabled government to take land through eminent domain to help support his family's interest in a massive data center development in Jones' home county south of Atlanta. As a state senator, Jones did vote for a 2017 law that opened a narrow exception in Georgia's law prohibiting governments from conveying property seized through condemnation proceedings to private developers. But eminent domain isn't being used to benefit the \$10 billion development that government filings show could include 11 million square feet (1 million square meters) of data centers.

Group's records are a dead end

Georgians for Integrity lists its local address as a mailbox at an Atlanta office supply store east on some paperwork submitted to television stations. A media buyer named Alex Roberts, with a Park City, Utah, address, is also listed on those papers, but he hasn't responded to an email from the AP. Neither has Kimberly Land, a Columbus, Ohio, lawyer listed on incorporation papers. After weeks of heavy spending, no one has proved who's providing the cash. □

California drops lawsuit seeking to reinstate federal funding for the state's bullet train

By SOPHIE AUSTIN

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — California this week dropped a lawsuit officials filed against the Trump administration over the federal government's withdrawing of \$4 billion for the state's long-delayed high-speed rail project.

The U.S. Transportation Department slashed funds for the bullet train aimed at connecting San Francisco to Los Angeles in July. The Trump administration has said the California High-Speed Rail Authority had "no viable

plan" to complete a large segment of the project in the farm-rich Central Valley.

The authority quickly filed a lawsuit, with Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom calling the federal government's decision "a political stunt to punish California."

The authority said this week that it would focus on other funding sources to complete the project, which is estimated to cost more than \$100 billion.

"This action reflects the State's assessment that the federal government is not a

reliable, constructive, or trustworthy partner in advancing high-speed rail in California," an authority spokesperson said in a statement.

The Transportation Department did not respond to a request for comment. President Donald Trump and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy have both previously criticized the project as a "train to nowhere."

"The Railroad we were promised still does not exist, and never will," Trump said on his social media platform Truth Social in July. "This project



The Cedar Viaduct, designed to take high-speed trains over Cedar and North avenues and State Route 99, is shown in an aerial view, Tuesday, April 15, 2025, in Fresno, Calif.

(AP Photo/Godofredo A. Vásquez, File)

was Severely Overpriced, Overregulated, and NEVER DELIVERED."

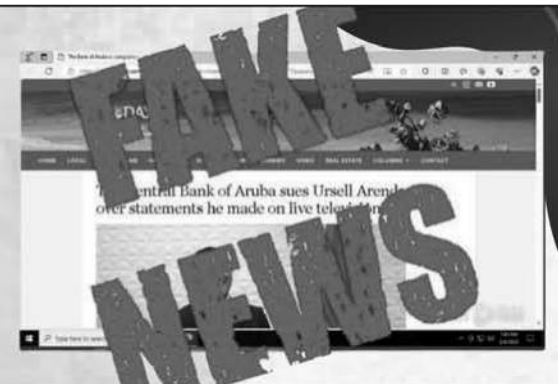
The authority's decision to

drop the lawsuit comes as the group seeks private investors to support the bullet train. □

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Central African Republic's incumbent president, a Russian ally, eyes a third term in key elections



Voters look for their names on a registration list at a polling station during the presidential election in Bangui, Central African Republic, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025.

By **JEAN-FERNAND KOENA**
Associated Press

BANGUI, Central African Republic (AP) — Voters in the Central African Republic are electing a new president and federal lawmakers Sunday, with incumbent President Faustin Archange Touadéra seen as likely to win a third term after trying to stabilize the country with the help of Russian mercenaries. Touadéra is one of Russia's closest allies in Africa and analysts say a third term win for him would likely consolidate Russia's security and economic interests in the country even as Moscow faces growing scrutiny over its mercenaries' roles in Africa. The Central African Republic was among the first in Africa to welcome Russia-backed forces, with Moscow seeking to help protect authorities and fight armed groups. Tensions, though, have grown this year over Moscow's demand to replace the private Wagner mercenary group with the

Russian military unit Africa Corps. Some 2.4 million voters are registered to vote in Sunday's national elections, which is unprecedented in scope as it combines the presidential, legislative, regional and municipal ballots. There were initial delays with voting starting an hour late in some polling stations mostly in outlying districts of the capital, Bangui. Some voters also said they couldn't find their names on the electoral rolls, or where they are to vote.

"When we arrived, no one was ready. With these delays, we risk voting until 8 p.m.," said Barthélemy Wadenguende, a voter in Bangui. Provisional results are expected in a week's time. A runoff will be held if no presidential candidate gets more than 50% of the votes cast. Touadéra faces challenges from six candidates, including prominent opposition figures Anicet-Georges Dologuélé and Henri-Marie Dondra, both former prime

(AP Photo/Jean-Fernand Koena)

ministers. The election is being held without the main opposition coalition, the Republican Bloc for the Defense of the Constitution, which said in October that it will boycott the election after denouncing what it called an unequal political environment. Neither Dologuélé nor Dondra are part of it. Analysts say Touadéra is a clear favorite after consolidating his control of state institutions in recent years, and due to the absence of strong opposition. Backed by Russia, he has hinged his campaign on efforts to achieve peace, stability and economic recovery in the country of about 5.5 million people, long battered by conflict. The landlocked country has been plagued by fighting between pro-government forces and armed groups, particularly since 2013 when predominantly Muslim rebels seized power and forced then President François Bozizé from office. □

UK leader criticized for applauding return of man freed from Egyptian prison as old tweets resurface

By **DANICA KIRKA**
Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K. prime minister is facing criticism after he celebrated the return to Britain of a human rights activist who was recently released from an Egyptian prison but whose past social media posts apparently contained violent and antisemitic language.

Successive British governments have campaigned for the release of Alaa Abd el-Fattah, a dual national who had been imprisoned in Egypt for most of the past 14 years.

He returned to the U.K. on Friday after Egyptian authorities lifted a travel ban that had forced him to remain in the country since he was freed in September. But a senior member of the opposition Conservative Party on Saturday criticized Prime Minister Keir Starmer for giving a "personal, public endorsement" to Abd el-Fattah when Starmer said he was "delighted" the activist had been reunited with his family in Britain. Robert Jenrick, the Conservative spokesman on justice issues, demanded to know whether Starmer knew about historical social media posts in which Abd el-Fattah allegedly endorsed killing "zionists" and police. Jenrick also called on Starmer to condemn Abd el-Fattah's statements and withdraw his "unalloyed endorsement" of the activist.

"Nobody should be imprisoned arbitrarily nor for peaceful dissent," Jenrick wrote. "But neither should the prime minister place the authority of his office behind someone whose own words cross into the language of racism and bloodshed."

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said in a statement that it had been "a long-standing priority" of governments under both major parties to work for Abd el-Fattah's release. But that does not imply an endorsement of his social media posts, the spokesman said.

"The government condemns Mr. El-Fattah's historic tweets and considers them to be abhorrent," the statement said, using a slightly different style for his last name.

Abd el-Fattah's family in the U.K. had vigorously campaigned for his release, arguing that he had spent most of the past 14 years behind bars because of his opposition to the government of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

His mother, Laila Soueif, 69, staged a 10-month hunger strike to pressure British authorities to do more to secure her son's release.

Starmer on Friday paid tribute to Abd el-Fattah's family and all the others who campaigned for his freedom. □

Brazilian judge puts coup plot convicts under house arrest after former police commander flees

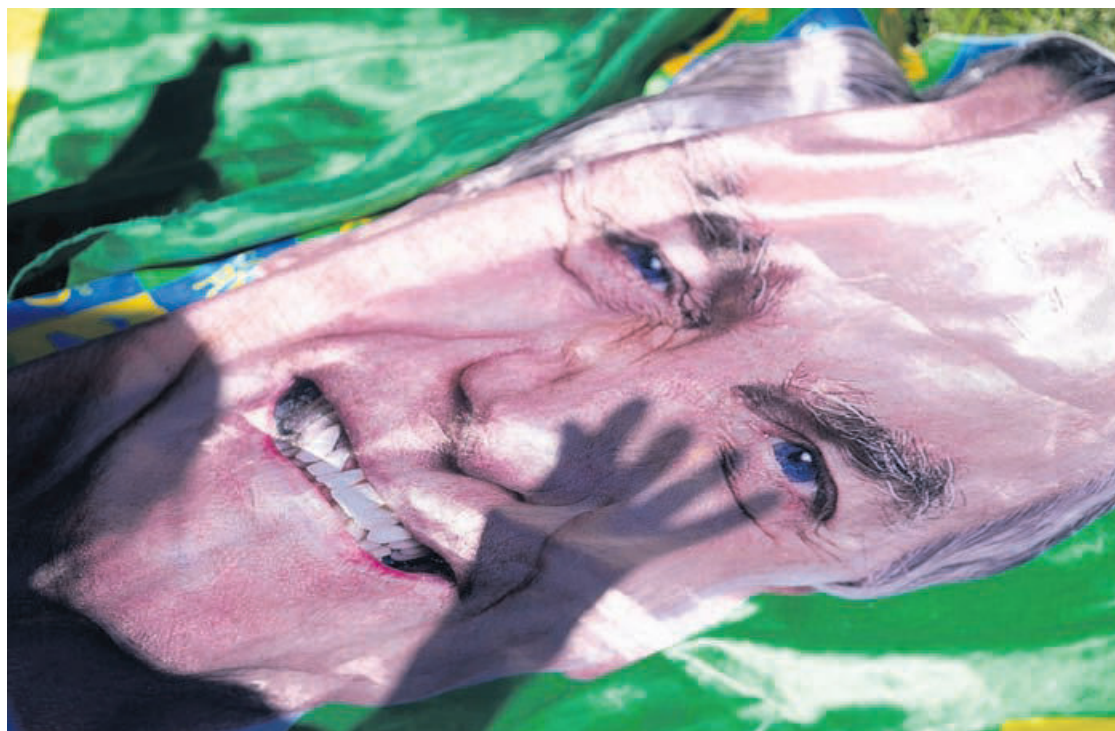
By **GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA**
and **MANUEL RUEDA**
Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — A Brazilian judge on Saturday issued house arrest orders for 10 people who have been convicted and sentenced for participating in a plot to keep former President Jair Bolsonaro in power after he lost the 2022 election.

The decision by Supreme Court Judge Alexandre de Moraes came just hours after authorities in neighboring Paraguay arrested a former police commander, who also had been convicted in the plot and returned him to Brazil.

Silvinei Vasques, the former director of Brazil's Federal Highway Police, was extradited to Brazil on Friday night, after he had secretly entered Paraguay and attempted to board a flight to El Salvador using Paraguayan documents. According to Brazilian police, Vasques tore off his ankle monitor on Thursday and drove to Paraguay in a rental car.

The 10 people subjected to house arrest orders Saturday had been facing caution-



The shadow of a supporter of former President Jair Bolsonaro is cast on an image of him displayed outside the hospital where he was transported from prison for surgery the next day, in Brasilia, Brazil, Wednesday, Dec. 24, 2025.

ary measures, like the use of ankle monitors, or had been ordered to stay at the same location every night.

They include Filipe Martins, a former adviser to Bolsonaro. Martins' lawyer, Jeffrey Chiquini, said on X that they will file an appeal.

"There is no greater injustice than condemning a person

for the actions of another," Chiquini said.

Bolsonaro was convicted and sentenced to 27 years in prison for attempting a coup to remain in office despite his 2022 electoral defeat. The former president, who has been serving prison time since November, has been hospitalized since

Wednesday. After undergoing double hernia surgery on Thursday, his wife, Michelle Bolsonaro, said Saturday that he's undergoing a procedure for persistent hiccups.

"It has been nine months of anguish and daily hiccups," she said on social media. The trials against Bolsonaro

and several generals and police officers accused of participating in the plot have been closely followed in Brazil, where democracy was reinstated in 1985, after decades of military rule.

U.S. President Donald Trump initially described the proceedings against ideological ally Bolsonaro as a "witch hunt" and raised tariffs on Brazilian imports over Bolsonaro's trial, which he described as an "international disgrace."

The Trump administration had also placed financial sanctions against de Moraes, the lead judge in Bolsonaro's trial. But the U.S. government appears to have softened its stance following Bolsonaro's conviction.

In November, Trump signed an executive order lowering tariffs on Brazilian beef and coffee, two of the country's largest exports to the United States.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Treasury lifted sanctions against de Moraes and his wife, as both nations continue to engage in trade negotiations. □

(AP Photo/Eraldo Peres)

Thailand's political parties name prime minister candidates for February election

By **WASAMON AUDJARINT**
and **JINTAMAS SAKSORN-CHAI**

Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Political parties in Thailand on Sunday registered their candidates for the next prime minister, marking the unofficial start of campaigning for the Feb. 8 general election.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul dissolved Parliament earlier this month to call early polls, after the main opposition party prepared to seek a no-confidence vote over constitutional change. Calling a new election allows Anutin and his Bhumjaithai Party to build up their numbers in the House of Representatives to gain a more secure grip on government. Voters will simultaneously cast ballots in a referendum asking whether they want

a new constitution, a move promoted by progressive parties who claim the current powers held by the bureaucracy and unelected bodies are undemocratic. The election is seen as a three-party race.

The election is seen as primarily pitting Anutin's conservative party against the progressive People's Party, which under a different name and leadership won the highest number of House seats in the 2023 election. It ended up being blocked by conservative lawmakers from gathering enough support to form a government. The populist Pheu Thai Party, backed by billionaire former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, is another major contender. It took power after the 2023 election, when the People's Party's

effort was stymied. Thaksin remains the dominant figure behind Pheu Thai even though he is serving a prison term for convictions related to corruption and abuse of power.

Anutin's government saw a slip in popularity following deadly flooding in southern Thailand and high-profile scandals that ensnared several officials and business figures. However, he may have boosted his appeal by adopting an aggressive military posture appealing to nationalists as Thailand engaged in large-scale combat with Cambodia over a long-standing border dispute.

The Election Commission says 68 people from 32 parties registered as prime minister candidates, while 1,502 people from 52 par-



Thailand's Prime Minister and leader of Bhumjaithai Party Anutin Charnvirakul, front right, arrives for a candidate registration in Bangkok, Thailand, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025.

(AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

ties are running as "party list" nominees, who gain seats according to each party's proportional share of the vote.

Another 3,092 candidates are running for direct election by constituency.

Each party is allowed to

propose up to three candidates. The Bhumjaithai party selected just two, with veteran diplomat Sihasak Phuangketkeow, who currently serves as foreign minister, being the backup to Anutin. Their main challenger is the People's Party. □

Hundreds mourn in Syria's Homs after deadly mosque bombing

By OMAR SANADIKI

Associated Press

HOMS, Syria (AP) — Hundreds of mourners gathered Saturday in the rain and cold outside of a mosque in the Syrian city of Homs for the funeral of eight people killed in a bombing, as an imam warned that the attack could spark more sectarian violence.

The crowd assembled next to the Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque, the target of Friday's attack that also wounded 18 others. The population of the Wadi al-Dhahab neighborhood, where the mosque is located, is predominantly from the Alawite minority. They later drove in convoys to bury the victims.

Officials have said the preliminary investigations indicate explosive devices were planted inside the mosque but have not yet publicly identified a suspect.

A little-known group calling itself Saraya Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on its Telegram channel, in which it indicated that the attack intended to target members of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam whom hard-line Islamists consider to be apostates.

The same group had previously claimed a suicide attack in June in which a gunman opened fire and then



A man holds an imaginary depiction of Ali ibn Abi Talib during the funeral of victims of an attack a day earlier at the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque in the predominantly Alawite Wadi al-Dhahab neighborhood of Homs, Syria, Saturday, Dec. 27, 2025.

(AP Photo/Omar Sanadiki)

detonated an explosive vest inside a Greek Orthodox church in Dweil'a, on the outskirts of Damascus, killing 25 people as worshippers prayed on a Sunday. A neighbor of the mosque, who asked to be identified only by the honorific Abu Ahmad ("father of Ahmad") out of security concerns, said he was at home when he heard the sound of a "very very strong explosion."

He and other neighbors went to the mosque and saw ter-

rificed people running out, he said. They entered and began trying to help the wounded.

Sheikh Mohieddin Salloum, the imam of the mosque, who was lightly injured in the explosion, said the mosque was Alawite but was open to Muslims of other sects to come and pray, and they often did so.

"This is God's house — our Sunni neighbors come and pray here with us, but in small numbers. They might be five

or 10" out of 300 attendees during Friday prayer, he said. Salloum said he believes the attack was intended to set off a new round of sectarian strife as the country struggles to heal after a nearly 14-year civil war that ended with the ouster of former President Bashar Assad in December 2024.

Anger was palpable among Alawite residents who gathered for the funeral, but the imam called for calm.

"They set an explosion in

an Alawite mosque to create emotions of hate and anger among the Alawites, and maybe a few days later someone will set off an explosion in a Sunni mosque and say that the Alawites took revenge," Salloum said. "Then the idiots from both sides will come and start fighting, and we'll all be dragged behind them if we don't keep level heads."

The country has experienced several waves of sectarian clashes since Assad's fall. Assad, an Alawite, fled the country to Russia.

In March, an ambush carried out by Assad's supporters against security forces triggered days of violence that left hundreds of people dead, most of them Alawites. Since then, although the situation has calmed, Alawites have been targeted sporadically in sectarian attacks.

Syrian government officials condemned Friday's attack and pledged to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Mourners prayed outside because they were unable to enter the mosque as the crime scene remained cordoned off. Some marched through the streets chanting "Ya Ali," a reference to the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law whom Shiite Muslims consider to be his rightful successor. □

Protesting students in Serbia urge support for early election they hope will oust Vucic



Serbia's protesting university students collect signatures for their request for an early parliamentary election, in Belgrade, Serbia, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025.

(AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

By JOVANA GEC

Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbia's protesting university students on Sunday collect-

ed signatures throughout the country for their request for an early parliamentary election that they hope would oust the autocratic govern-

ment of President Aleksandar Vucic from office.

Braving freezing weather, the students set up nearly 500 stands in dozens of cities, towns and villages in the Balkan country for residents to sign the election demand, which isn't a formal petition. Students have said that Sunday's action was meant to put further pressure on Vucic and as a test of support.

Young protesters have been at the forefront of a nationwide movement against Vucic's populist rule in Serbia. More than a year of street protests first started in November 2024 after a train station disaster that killed 16 people. The concrete canopy collapse in the northern city of Novi Sad was

widely blamed on alleged rampant corruption and disregard of construction and safety rules during renovation work at the station. No one has been held responsible for the tragedy. Vucic has refused to schedule an immediate early vote, but has suggested that it could be held sometime next year. Both parliamentary and presidential elections are otherwise due in 2027.

"We have stands that serve to connect with the citizens," said Igor Dojnov, a student manning one of the points in central Belgrade.

Youth-led protests during the past year have shaken Vucic more than ever during his 13-year-long tenure. Serbia's populist prime min-

ister resigned in January, and Vucic later launched a crackdown on protesters that also drew international criticism. While street protests have subsided, discontent with Vucic's government is believed to be widespread. Milca Cankovic Kadijevic, a resident of Belgrade, said that she supported the students, because "I have a desire to live decently — me, my children and my grandchildren." Vucic has formally promised to take Serbia into the European Union, but he has maintained close links with Russia and China, while facing accusations of clamping down on democratic freedoms and allowing corruption and organized crime to flourish. □

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Today is going to be a good day

(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls



The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can

drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center.

For more information, visit the website www.acf.aw

The Lighthouse



No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started

the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light.

Kayak in the Mangroves



Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout—as it might get a little windy and rough—you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. It's fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. □

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Best spots to view the sunset

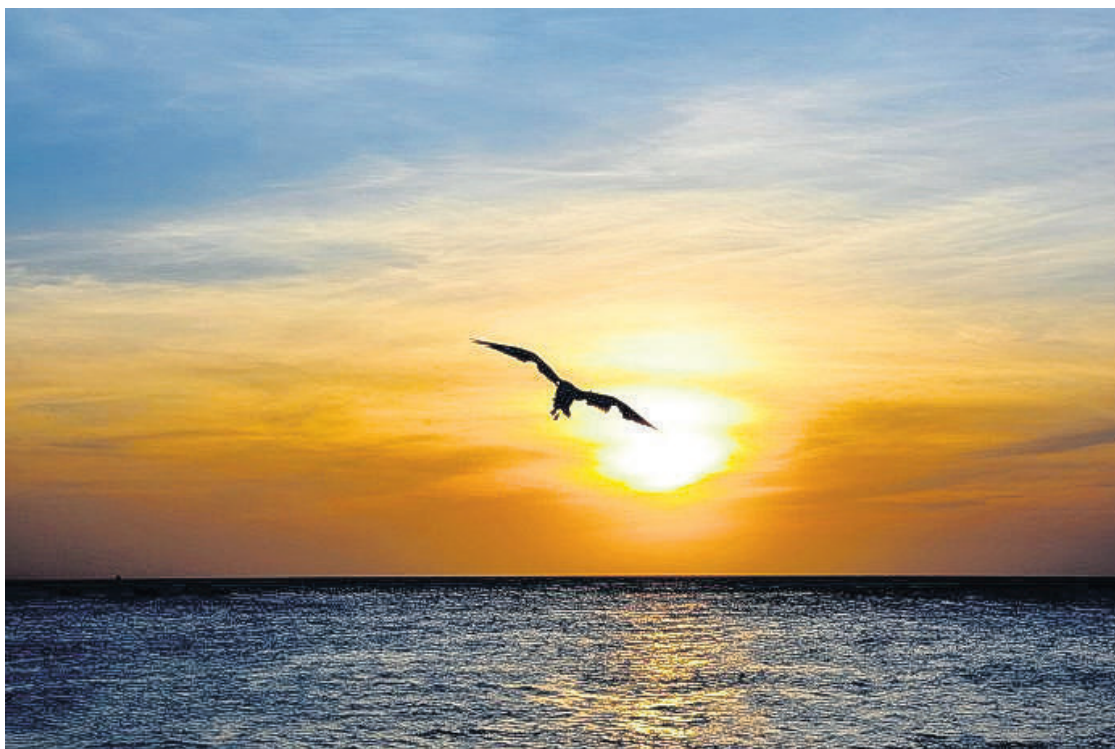
(Oranjestad)—What can be more romantic than surprising your partner with a date watching the sunset? Aruba's sunset leave many speechless, and luckily, the best spots to view the sunset are entirely accessible and easy to find. Here are some of the best places to view the sunset on the island.

California Light House

Of course, being one of the highest points easily accessible to locals and tourists, the California Light House hill not only offers a tremendous view of the sunset, but also a breath taking scenery of most of the island. In the distance you can spot all the hotels, the western shoreline and the wild waves that crash on the northern side of the island.

Manchebo & Eagle Beach

Speaking of the western shoreline, the best spots for viewing the sunset on



the beach has to be either the Manchebo Beach or at Eagle Beach, which stretch along the entire western coast of the island. The sunset on these beaches is truly breathtaking; the sky and ocean look so big and spacious, and paired with

the orange/pink hue of the sunset, the white sandy beaches and the soft sounds of waves crashing—it can only be described as an experience!

Arashi Beach

Another beach that has to

be considered as another great spot to view the sunset. Arashi Beach is the last beach you will find along the western coast line, just before you drive up the hill to the California Light House. A favorite for surfers and body boarders, the

Arashi sky stretches out for miles, lending a spectacular canvas for the sun to create a masterpiece of orange, pink and purple

Hooiberg Hill

These last two options are for more active couples. If you and your partner like to hike, the Hooiberg Hill may be a great place for you to get your daily workout in and enjoy a beautiful view of the sunset and the island as a little reward. Climb on top the 587-step stairs and reach the top to enjoy this incredible scenery.

Casibari Rock Formation

If you're a rock climber, you might enjoy watching the sunset on top of the Casibari Rock Formation. It's no Yosemite, but it does offer a fun little exercise to get to the top. But if you prefer not to get your hands a little dirty, you can always use the stairs in the back. hue. □

Aruba's Bocas: home to the rarest fossil reefs on the planet!

(Oranjestad)—If you've been to the northern coast of Aruba already, you've probably noticed how the ground differs entirely from the sandy beaches on the southern part of the island.

These hard surfaces, with sharp bumps and holes are actually fossilized coral reefs, of which its growth and changes can be traced back to the last glacial period.



On May 30 2023, geoscientists, Dr. Patrick Boyden from the Marum research faculty at the University of Bremen, Prof. dr. Alessio Rovere from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Prof. dr. Gianfranco Scicchitano, from the University of Bari Aldo Moro, presented their research on these fossilized coral reefs at the University of Aruba. Their focus for their research included studying the health and formation patterns of these coral reefs, and to investigate how these reefs have responded and can respond to fluctuating sea levels or extreme weather, like hurricanes and tsunamis.

Through underwater and land surveillance, and 3D models of the reefs, they were able to narrow down when these formations started to take place. They were also able to track the fluctuation of sea levels during the past hundred or even thousands of years, and the effects that this fluctuation has had on the coral reefs of the windward side of Aruba.

These findings can certainly put things into perspective. The ground on which we have walked many times on the northern part of the island hold such rich history, history that dates back to a time that most of us cannot even imagine. As the scientists themselves have

pointed out, these fossilized reefs on the windward side are truly an incredible and rare remnant of geological history, as they provide a clear view of how these reefs have formed.

This research is also important for the future of coral reefs on the island. By studying rising sea levels and climate impact on these coral reefs, we are able to take concrete action in protecting and preserve our coral reefs. So, if you are ever visiting one of the bocas or driving along the northern part of the island, please be conscious to help protect our natural historical remnant. Oh, and wear (coral-friendly) sunscreen! □

A young girl with dark hair, wearing a white shirt and a blue wristband, is pointing her right index finger at a petroglyph on a cave wall. The petroglyph is a circular design with internal lines. To its right is a larger, more complex petroglyph featuring a central square with internal patterns and radiating lines. The cave wall is light-colored and shows signs of age and weathering. The girl is looking up at the art with interest.

The Lionfish and its threat to our marine wild life



(Oranjestad)—Despite its colorful and striking appearance, the lionfish has become a Caribbean-wide problem for Atlantic sea life. The Aruban marine wild life is also affected by this beautiful dilemma, as it is foreign to our waters and has become a danger to our local fish and reefs.

Originating from the Indo-Pacific Ocean, the lionfish is a relatively small fish. It has

no teeth, but it does protect itself against predators using its sharp, colorful spikes. It is said that the sting of a lionfish can be up to 100 times more painful than that of a bee's sting.

Its natural predators in the Indo-Pacific are sharks and barracudas, but in the Caribbean Sea, local fish do not recognize the lionfish as part of their diet. In other words, the lionfish has no predators

in the Caribbean Sea. And this becomes a major problem for our local marine life; if there are no predators to stimulate population control of lionfish, these fish can continue to reproduce and expand to other parts of the Atlantic, become more invasive and dangerous for other types of fish.

For Aruba, the lionfish is a problem especially for our local coral reefs. According to Patrick van Brakel, lionfish expert and hunter from the Hunting Lionfish Aruba foundation, every reef has a "cleaning station"—tiny fish that eat algae and other types of waste on a reef, thus maintaining the reef's health and providing food to the fish population in the area. However, as the lionfish feeds off of these tiny fish, it becomes harder for the coral reef to maintain its health.

Patrick also shares the origins of lionfish in the Caribbean Sea. It is theorized that the introduction of these fish in the Atlantic happened in Florida, where people would



buy lionfish from across the world to keep in their aquariums. However, lionfish grow, and as these buyers realized that the fish were too much upkeep, they were let out into the ocean to roam free. From continental USA, the lionfish travelled to and invaded the entire Caribbean area, from Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao up to New York. In Aruba, lionfish were discovered in 2009.

Controlling the lionfish population is challenge, as each female fish can lay up to 40,000 eggs a day. Luckily,

we have people like van Brakel who dedicate their lives hunting and capturing these invasive species, using them for consumption and jewelry making.

They are caught with a hand spear, an object resembling a garbage picker with 4 sharp prongs. These spears are used like a sling shot to catch lionfish from a distance. These fish are then put into a collecting tube and taken out of the water. This way, he does his part in protecting the local wild life. □

Aruba: The island of Aloes

ORANJESTAD – Aloe Vera, a succulent plant species, is renowned for its incredible properties for the skin. It is widely distributed and usually grows in tropical, semi-tropical and arid climates on the planet. But this plant also had a very prominent role in the history of Aruba, and its significance to the island's economy endures to this day.

The leaves of Aloe Vera contain a good amount of gel which when used topically, is great for the skin. Tradition-

ally, Arubans use this gel to treat minor burns and other skin ailments, or just to keep skin supple and looking bright and nourished. Aside from the gel, aloe contains a bitter, yellow substance (called aloin) which is a gentle but powerful laxative, and it is also the origin of the industry of aloe in Aruba.

Aloe vera was introduced in Aruba around 1840, when most of the island's inhabitants were farmers of little means. Dutch Governor Van Raders introduced the plant

after it had been introduced in other islands of the Caribbean to cultivate and harvest the aloe to produce the laxative.

Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes."

Under Commander Jan Helenus Ferguson (1866-1871), aloe experienced a boom, which is why there is a road named after him, which goes through the aloe fields. In the 19th century, Aruba was the main supplier of aloin for laxative, which was imported abroad to the United States and Europe. The aloin from Aruba and Curaçao was known to be one of the best in the world and was more expensive, which meant that at the time, it had significant economic impact, particularly for the local farmers.

However, by the time the oil



industry arrived on Aruba, it changed the labor market on Aruba, shifting away from agriculture. It would be after World War II that aloe would make a comeback. And eventually, as science learned about the amazing properties of aloe gel, the industry shifted from producing laxative to producing skin care. An interesting fact is that in 1951, the production of Aruban aloe amounted to around 30 percent of the total global production!

The impact and relevance

of aloe is visible all around Aruba. While most homes will have a few plants for personal use and decoration, houses are also decorated with aloe motifs, and at some point, aloe even featured on post stamps. Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes." And in 1955, the aloe became a part of Aruba's coat of arms, symbolizing prosperity for the island. □

Images from the archive of the National Library of Aruba.



The district of Savaneta: A quick history guide to the island's first capital

(Oranjestad)—Before Oranjestad became the island nation's capital, Aruba's first capital was the district of Savaneta. Here is where the cultural identity of Aruba was born, and from where the rest of the island developed into what it is today.

Savaneta is said to have been the first place where the Caquetio inhabitants first stepped foot on the island. Though there isn't hard evidence to back this up, but considering the legend of the Cacique Arua, it is believed that there were already movements on Aruba—and Savaneta—around 88 AD.

The Caquetios probably made their way to the island either from Venezuela, Colombia or other Caribbean islands in the region, but with good weather it was relatively easy for them to travel back and forth in their canoes. So, since the Caquetios discovered the island, Aruba found her first form of civilization.

It wasn't until 1499 when Aruba met another group of people who set foot on the island: the Spanish explorer Alonso de Ojeda. De Ojeda first took notice of Aruba off the coast of Venezuela, during his exploration of the Latin American country. This was on August 9th, 1499. However, de Ojeda didn't actually sail to the island till 4 days later, on August 23rd, 1499. This was the beginning of the Spanish era on Aruba (1499-1636).

Alonso usually didn't stop at every island or land he saw, especially not in the Caribbean. He would often take



notice of land from afar and continue sailing. However, Aruba was an exception. He had heard that there were "quebracho" (Kibrahacha) trees on the island, which were commonly used to produce dye or paint. But since these trees could not be found in Savaneta, he continued to search in the area of what is now known as Santa Cruz. The best way to transport the tree barks was via a route passing through Savaneta, and so the first road between Savaneta and Santa Cruz was made.

The Dutch colonial era (1636-1805)

During the 80-year war between The Netherlands and Spain, Dutch explorers and merchants began to travel to the ABC islands. Once they landed in Aruba, they deported the small Arawan and Spanish community that was living on the island. This was the beginning of colonization of the ABC islands by the Dutch empire. Around the same, the West Indian Company (WIC) was born. Bonaire and Curacao were mostly used for plantations, where the Dutch had transported slaves from Africa. Aruba, on the other hand, was mostly used to raise cattle and to house the haring factory. The

Dutch had often forced the indigenous community to work for them.

In 1636, when the Netherlands won the war against Spain, the country surrendered the islands to the Dutch.

The Dutch administration appointed the island's first commander, an Irish man named N. Williams. Because the Dutch were interested in other Caribbean islands and countries in South America, they imported Dutch merchants and business men, all of whom resided in Savaneta. This way, Savaneta officially became the island's

first capital.

However, at the end of the 18th century, the commander at the time, J.R. Lauffer, moved his office to what is now "Horse Bay" in Oranjestad. Because the highest office on the island moved away from Savaneta, the capital lost its title to what was called then Playa.

How Savaneta got its name The name Savaneta probably has a Spanish origin. It was said that when the Spanish climbed a hill called Yara, they saw that the area was mostly open and had no big trees. In Spanish, such a land area is called a "savana".

Because of its land surface, Savaneta was a great place to construct cattle farms. From here, the farmer culture on Aruba was born. Before the Aruban Gold Rush and the construction of the Refinery in San Nicolas, most residents were farmers, and Savaneta had many inhabitants that farmed fruits and vegetables. They also continued the tradition of raising cattle, like goat, sheep, pigs and horses. Savaneta was one of the first places on the island to have a general farming culture. From this culture, many other traditions were born, like the Dera Gay Holiday that we celebrate every year on June 24th. □

Source: *Historia di Savaneta*
(History of Savaneta) by Adolf
"Dufi" Kock.



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 39 Ledger item
- 1 Southern dish
- 6 Hardly wordy
- 11 Bolshevik leader
- 12 Succulent plants
- 13 Tennis star Naomi
- 14 Schemes
- 15 List of lines
- 17 Game cube
- 18 Total
- 19 Studio time
- 22 Agreeable answer
- 23 Horse restraint
- 24 HMO fee
- 25 Can feature
- 27 Lsr. neighbor
- 30 Meals
- 31 Heady brew
- 32 Shelley work
- 33 Brings dishonor upon
- 35 Seminar group
- 38 Uniform color

DOWN

- 1 Not matte
- 2 Save
- 3 Up — (indignant)
- 4 Poly-nesian idol
- 5 Pics
- 6 Keg need
- 7 Angled pipe
- 8 Band aide
- 9 Grad-to-be
- 10 German steel city
- 16 Service pieces
- 20 Hockey plays
- 21 Pig's place
- 24 Busy one in Apr.
- 25 Intellect-ual showoff
- 26 Interested in trying
- 27 Thin layer
- 28 Late hour
- 29 Plagues
- 30 Boxing ring border
- 34 Guinness of film
- 36 Misstep
- 37 Caustic stuff

H	A	D	E	S		R	I	S	E	S
E	G	R	E	T		A	R	O	M	A
Y	O	U	R	E		G	O	B	I	G
	N	I	P	S		N	E	T	S	
P	O	K	E		P	O	O	R		
A	D	A		H	Y	M	N	A	L	S
C	O	S	M	O		A	S	S	E	T
T	R	A	I	T	O	R		A	N	Y
	S	L	E	D		A	J	A	X	
C	A	K	E		E	C	R	U		
U	S	U	A	L		L	O	D	G	E
B	I	N	G	E		E	A	G	E	R
A	S	K	E	D		F	R	E	T	S

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10
11						12				
13						14				
15					16			17		
18				19		20	21			
22				23						
			24							
30								31		
32					33		34			
35			36	37		38				
39						40				
41						42				

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-7 CRYPTOQUOTE

M COJ VPE ZPT C HMNFEDT

ISTXDV, ISE ZPT ITPCXDT

OFPSHXDT O. — GDAMOF

QTPWDTI

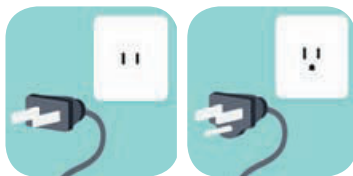
Cryptoquote: TODAY I SHALL BEHAVE AS IF THIS IS THE DAY I WILL BE REMEMBERED. — DR. SEUSS

Cruise ship Schedule: Dec. 25 - 31 2025

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
THU	25	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	18.00	B	1
		BRILLIANCE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		NORWEGIAN DAWN	11.00	20.00	I	1
FRI	26	NORWEGIAN JEWEL	07.00	20.00	B	1
		CARIBBEAN PRINCESS	09.00	22.00	C	1
		ISLAND PRINCESS	09.00	18.00	I	1
SUN	28	MARELLA DISCOVERY	08.00	20.00	B	1
		CELEBRITY ASCENT	09.30	23.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
MON	29	SEABOURN OVATION	08.00	22.00	B	1
		MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
TUE	30	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1
WED	31	BRITANNIA	07.00	18.00	B	1
		CARNIVAL VISTA	08.00	22.00	C	1
		EXPLORER OF THE SEAS	11.59	****	I	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 8 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

	3	8						5
			5	2		3	9	
			4		3		8	
3			1	5	7	9		4
7		1			4	6	5	3
5		2	6	3				
1	7		3			5	6	
	2		8	9				7
		4			6			

Difficulty: ★

12/29

Answer to previous puzzle

2	5	8	3	7	6	4	1	9
6	4	9	1	5	2	3	7	8
3	7	1	9	4	8	2	6	5
5	8	2	4	6	1	7	9	3
1	9	4	7	8	3	5	2	6
7	6	3	2	9	5	1	8	4
8	1	6	5	3	7	9	4	2
9	2	5	8	1	4	6	3	7
4	3	7	6	2	9	8	5	1

Difficulty: ★★★★★

12/28

Foods with healthy-sounding buzzwords could be hiding added sugar in plain sight



This photo illustration shows granulated sugar falling from a spoon, in Philadelphia, on Sept. 12, 2016.
(AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File)

By **ALBERT STUMM**
Associated Press

(AP) - Many consumers feel pride in avoiding the glazed pastries in the supermarket and instead opting for "all natural" granola that comes packed with extra protein. Same goes for low-fat yogurts "made with real fruit," "organic" plant-based milks and bottled "superfood" smoothies.

Buyer beware: Healthy grocery buzzwords like those often cover up an unhealthy amount of sugar.

Added sugars are difficult to quickly spot because many companies use clever marketing to distract consumers, said Nicole Avena, a professor of neuroscience and psychiatry at Mount Sinai Medical School and Princeton University who has

studied added sugars. Avena said while some health-forward brands know people are starting to become aware of the hazards of added sugars, "a lot of the bigger brands don't worry so much about people's health."

Here's how to spot hidden sugars and what to do about it.

What to look for

Along with saturated fat and salt, eating excess sugar is linked to heart disease, obesity, diabetes and other health risks.

The average American consumes 17 grams of added sugar a day, which adds up to 57 pounds (26 kilograms) per year, according to the American Heart Association. About half of that comes from beverages, but much of the rest is sneaked into cereal, salsa, prepared sandwiches, dairy products, bottled sauces and baked goods, including many brands of whole-grain bread.

To help control sugar intake, start by checking the nutrition label. Since 2021, food companies have been required to list the quantity of added sugars separately from total sugar content. But the plan backfired, Avena said. □

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San Nicolas

Imsan 24 hours
Tel.524 8833

PHARMACY ON DUTY

Oranjestad:

Sta. Cruz: Tel.585 8028
San Nicolas:
Centro Medico:Tel.584 5794

OTHER

Dental Clinic 587 9850
Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic
+297 588 0539

EMERGENCY

Police	100
Oranjestad	527 3140
Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
Police Tipline	11141
Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas	587 5900
Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport	524 2424
American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

AID FOUNDATIONS

Aruba Food Bank
Tel. 588 0002
FAVI- Visually Impaired
Tel. 582 5051
Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952
Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989
Fundacion Contra Violencia
Relacional Tel. 583 5400
Centre for Diabetes
Tel. 524 8888
Child Abuse Prevention
Tel. 582 4433
Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

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TODAY**

Brigitte Bardot, 1960s French sex symbol turned militant animal rights activist, dies at 91

By **THOMAS ADAMSON and ELAINE GANLEY**
Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Brigitte Bardot, the French 1960s sex symbol who became one of the greatest screen sirens of the 20th century and later a militant animal rights activist and far-right supporter, has died. She was 91.

Bardot died Sunday at her home in southern France, according to Bruno Jacquelin, of the Brigitte Bardot Foundation for the protection of animals. Speaking to The Associated Press, he gave no cause of death, and said that no arrangements had been made for funeral or memorial services. She had been hospitalized last month.

Bardot became an international celebrity as a sexualized teen bride in the 1956 movie "And God Created Woman." Directed by then husband Roger Vadim, it triggered a scandal with scenes of the long-legged beauty dancing on tables



French film legend and animal rights activist Brigitte Bardot looks on prior to a march of various animal rights associations on March 24, 2007 in Paris.

naked.

At the height of a cinema career that spanned more than two dozen films and three marriages, Bardot came to symbolize a nation bursting out of bourgeois respectability. Her tousled, blond hair, voluptuous figure and pouty irreverence made her one of France's best-known stars, even as she struggled with depression.

Such was her widespread appeal that in 1969 her features were chosen to be the model for "Marianne," the national emblem of France and the official Gallic seal. Bardot's face appeared on statues, postage stamps and coins.

Bardot's second career as an animal rights activist was equally sensational. She traveled to the Arctic to blow the whistle on the slaughter of baby seals. She also condemned the use of animals in laboratory experiments, and she opposed Muslim slaughter rituals.

Her activism earned her compatriots' respect and, in 1985, she was awarded the Legion of Honor, the nation's highest recognition.

Turn to the far right

Later, however, she fell from public grace as her animal protection diatribes took on a decidedly extremist tone. She frequently decried the influx of immigrants into France, especially Muslims. She was convicted and fined

five times in French courts of inciting racial hatred, in incidents inspired by her opposition to the Muslim practice of slaughtering sheep during annual religious holidays. Bardot's 1992 marriage to fourth husband Bernard d'Ormale, a onetime adviser to far-right National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, contributed to her political shift. She described Le Pen, an outspoken nationalist with multiple racism convictions of his own, as a "lovely, intelligent man."

In 2012, she supported the presidential bid of Marine Le Pen, who now leads her father's renamed National Rally party. Le Pen paid homage Sunday to an "exceptional woman" who was "incredibly French."

In 2018, at the height of the #MeToo movement, Bardot said in an interview that most actors protesting sexual harassment in the film industry were "hypocritical," because many played "the teases" with producers to land parts.

She said she had never had been a victim of sexual harassment and found it "charming to be told that I was beautiful or that I had a nice little ass."

Privileged but 'difficult' upbringing

Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot was born Sept. 28, 1934, to a wealthy industrialist. A shy child, she studied classical

(AP Photo/Jacques Brinon, file)

ballet and was discovered by a family friend who put her on the cover of Elle magazine at age 14.

Bardot once described her childhood as "difficult" and said that her father was a strict disciplinarian who would sometimes punish her with a horse whip.

Vadim, a French movie producer who she married in 1952, saw her potential and wrote "And God Created Woman" to showcase her provocative sensuality, an explosive cocktail of childlike innocence and raw sexuality.

The film, which portrayed Bardot as a teen who marries to escape an orphanage and then beds her brother-in-law, had a decisive influence on New Wave directors Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, and came to embody the hedonism and sexual freedom of the 1960s. The film was a box-office hit, and it made Bardot a superstar. Her girlish pout, tiny waist and generous bust were often more appreciated than her talent.

"It's an embarrassment to have acted so badly," Bardot said of her early films. "I suffered a lot in the beginning. I was really treated like someone less than nothing." Bardot's unabashed, off-screen love affair with co-star Jean-Louis Trintignant eradicated the boundaries between her public and pri-

vate life and turned her into a hot prize for paparazzi.

Bardot never adjusted to the limelight. She blamed the constant media attention for the suicide attempt that followed 10 months after the birth of her only child, Nicolas. Photographers had broken into her house two weeks before she gave birth to snap a picture of her pregnant. Nicolas' father was Jacques Charrier, a French actor who she married in 1959 but who never felt comfortable in his role as Monsieur Bardot. Bardot soon gave up her son to his father, and later said she had been chronically depressed and unready for the duties of being a mother.

"I was looking for roots then," she said in an interview. "I had none to offer."

In her 1996 autobiography "Initiales B.B.," she likened her pregnancy to "a tumor growing inside me," and described Charrier as "temperamental and abusive." Bardot married her third husband, West German millionaire playboy Gunther Sachs, in 1966, and they divorced three years later.

Among her films were "A Parisian" (1957); "In Case of Misfortune," in which she starred in 1958 with screen legend Jean Gabin; "The Truth" (1960); "Private Life" (1962); "A Ravishing Idiot" (1964); "Shalako" (1968); "Women" (1969); "The Bear And The Doll" (1970); "Rum Boulevard" (1971); and "Don Juan" (1973).

With the exception of 1963's critically acclaimed "Contempt," directed by Godard, Bardot's films were rarely complicated by plots. Often they were vehicles to display Bardot in scanty dresses or frolicking nude in the sun.

"It was never a great passion of mine," she said of filmmaking. "And it can be deadly sometimes. Marilyn (Monroe) perished because of it."

Bardot retired to her Riviera villa in St. Tropez at the age of 39 in 1973 after "The Woman Grabber." As fans brought flowers to her home Sunday, the local St. Tropez administration called for "respect for the privacy of her family and the serenity of the places where she lived." □



Editor

Caribbean Speed Printers N.V.
Aruba Bank N.V. Acc. #332668
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Editors

Pilar Flores

Richard Brooks

Angenette Figuereo

Oriana Geerman

Sales

Mark Gomes

Sulaika Croes

Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto

Weststraat 22
T: 582-7800

E: news@arubatoday.com

W: www.arubatoday.com

@ArubaTodayNews

South Africa coach Hugo Broos blasts lack of 'AFCON vibe' at Africa Cup in Morocco

By CIARÁN FAHEY

AP Sports Writer

RABAT, Morocco (AP) —

South Africa coach Hugo Broos isn't getting that usual Africa Cup of Nations feeling in Morocco.

Broos, who led Cameroon to the title in 2017 in Gabon and took South Africa to third place at the 2023 edition in Ivory Coast, said Sunday there was a lack of enthusiasm for the 35th Africa Cup.

"In the Ivory Coast and in Gabon, every second of the tournament you felt that you were in a tournament," Broos said. "The people were — when we went with the bus to train — the people were waving and they were with flags, and here you see nothing. So, I don't know, but yeah, there is no vibe, there is no typical AFCON vibe. I don't feel it here."

The Belgian coach was speaking in Marrakech ahead of South Africa's final group game against Zimbabwe on Monday. The Bafana Bafana opened with a hard-fought 2-1 win over Angola in Marrakech and then lost 1-0 to Egypt in Agadir.

Egypt is already through to the last 16 from Group B with a maximum six points from two games. It is followed by South Africa on three while Angola and Zimbabwe each have a point.

Angola plays Egypt on Monday and the top two progress from each group, along with the best third-place finishers.

Organizers have struggled to fill stadiums and the weather hasn't helped. There has been heavy rainfall every day of the tournament, except for Thursday when there were no games on the Christian holiday of Christmas Day. Morocco is a predominately Muslim country.

The tournament was originally scheduled for the summer, but it was pushed back to winter so it wouldn't clash with FIFA's new Club World Cup played in the United States.

Even Morocco games,

which were all sold out, have featured empty seats with touts blamed for snapping up tickets, frustrating fans' efforts to get access to the near 70,000-capacity Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium, where the home team is playing all its group games.

Security at other stadiums has allowed fans free entrance after kickoff to increase attendance. It has led to supporters without tickets waiting outside on the assumption they will be allowed in.

"Nobody came to see the game South Africa-Angola," Broos said after criticizing the arrangements for his team's subsequent match against Egypt.

"It was chaos before the

game ... they blocked everyone, even people with tickets.

They couldn't enter in the stadium because there was a crowd of people who didn't have a ticket and who were allowed to come in."

Broos praised the "nice stadiums" — all nine were newly constructed or renovated for the tournament — but said the atmosphere at the 2025 Africa Cup was uncharacteristically "cool."

"If they don't let the people free in the stadium, there is nobody," he said. "Nobody is coming to watch the game South Africa-Zimbabwe."

Morocco is also a co-host for the 2030 World Cup. □



South Africa's head coach Hugo Broos sits on the bench ahead of the Africa Cup of Nations group B soccer match between Angola and South Africa in Marrakech, Morocco, Monday, Dec. 22, 2025.

(AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)



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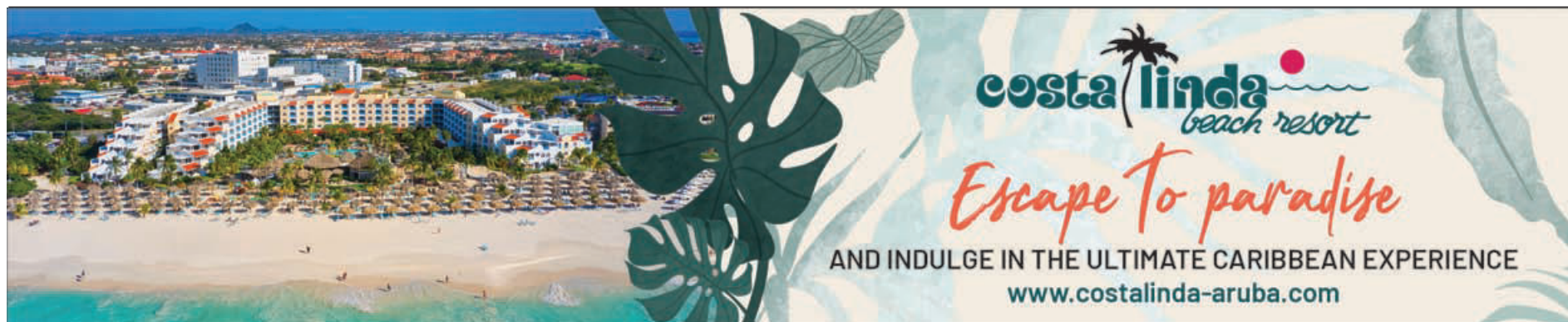
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MCG curator admits Boxing Day pitch error after 36 wickets fall in 2 days

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia

(AP) — Melbourne Cricket Ground staff have admitted that the pitch prepared for the Boxing Day test was skewed too heavily in favor of bowlers, as an attempt to avoid a dull draw instead triggered a frantic two-day landslide of wickets.

Curator Matt Page, recruited to inject "life" into the MCG deck following a lifeless 2017 Ashes stalemate, conceded Sunday that leaving 10mm of grass on the surface proved excessive. The decision resulted in 36 wickets falling across just 142 overs of play, leaving the surface under intense scrutiny from players and officials alike.

"I was in a state of shock after the first day... to see 20 wickets in a day," Page said. "I've never been involved in a test match like it and hopefully never involved in a test match like it again."

"It was a roller-coaster ride for two days to see everything unfold."

The result marked the first



England's Brydon Carse, right, completes a caught and bowled on Australia's Michael Neser, left, on Day 2 of their Ashes cricket test match in Melbourne, Saturday, Dec. 27, 2025.

(AP Photo/Hamish Blair)

time in 129 years a series has produced multiple two-day finishes, following a similar result in the first Ashes test at Perth.

Despite a first win for England in Australia since 2011, captain Ben Stokes was scathing in his assessment, suggesting that other na-

tions would face harsher consequences for such conditions.

"I'm pretty sure if that was somewhere else in the world there'd be hell on," Stokes said to the BBC after the match ended Saturday. "With 36 wickets in less than two days and no total over

200, I think you can read into that a lot.

"If that was another condition somewhere else... you probably would get a pasting." Despite the criticism and the millions of dollars in refunds for ticketholders triggered by the early finish, Australian Travis Head, the

leading run scorer for the series, defended the difficulty of the groundsman's role.

"Everyone wants to see wickets. No one wants to see blokes get 300s, Head said. "There needs to be a balance and sometimes we're going to see the balance like last week err to the batters and some weeks we're going to see it to the bowlers."

"So I do feel for him especially, obviously, in terms of the Boxing Day test and the amount of people. It's been highly talked about and it's probably the most talked about Ashes series that we've seen for a long time in terms of the last three or four weeks around everything that everyone does."

ICC match referee Jeff Crowe is expected to rate the surface this week, which takes into account feedback from both captains.

The fifth and final test of the series starts Jan. 4 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Australia leads the series 3-1 and has retained the Ashes. □



Morocco's Achraf Hakimi shakes hands with teammates ahead of the African Cup of Nations Group A soccer match between Morocco and Mali in Rabat, Morocco, Friday, 26, 2025.

(AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy)

By CIARÁN FAHEY

AP Sports Writer

RABAT, Morocco (AP) —

Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi has appealed for

the host nation's supporters to stop whistling the team at the Africa Cup of Nations.

"It's not normal for the supporters to whistle," Hakimi

Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi asks fans to stop whistling the team at Africa Cup

said Sunday before Morocco's final group game against Zambia on Monday. "We need that 12th man." The Moroccan players were subjected to whistles from the home fans at half time and again at full time after their disappointing 1-1 draw against Mali on Friday.

"We need the fans," Hakimi said. "But we have to respect our rivals. They're not easy opponents."

Morocco, the highest ranked African team at No. 11, is considered the favorite for the 35th edition of the tournament after reaching the semifinals of the 2022 World

Cup. The Atlas Lions have all their group games in the near 70,000-capacity Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat, the capital, where they will also play their first knockout game should they finish top of their group.

"We know the fans want us to win all the time. Since the World Cup, there's a new Morocco, but we mustn't forget to keep our feet on the ground. Having the AFCON at home helps us, but it doesn't make things easier. We need them behind us. And as for the criticism of the coach, he's done a great job. He was with the

team at the World Cup. He has changed mentalities, even mine." Morocco leads Group A with four points from two games, ahead of Mali and Zambia on two, with Comoros on one point before its final group game against Mali, also Monday.

Hakimi referred to his experience with his club Paris Saint-Germain, where the players were also whistled before the team went on to win the Champions League in May.

"People told us we weren't a great team. In the end, we're European champions. So there you have it," Hakimi said. □